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RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY

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INFO RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 4936

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SUBJECT: TOKYO MEDIA REACTION - RUSSIA

**LEAD STORIES:** Lead stories in Thursday morning papers included the expected arrest today of an MSDF officer on suspicion of leaking classified Aegis data, as well as the announcement by U.S. and European central banks that they will provide as much as 40 billion dollars to boost liquidity in the international banking system in order to tamp down financial turmoil associated with the subprime loan situation.

**¶1. "Very Odd Change of Leadership"** The conservative Sankei editorialized (12/13): "The word 'retirement' appears to be a forbidden one for Russian President Putin, who is scheduled to leave office next spring. First Deputy Prime Minister Medvedev, whom Putin has chosen as his heir apparent, decided to name his current boss prime minister even before his own election as president. A boss names his aide as the next leader, and then that aide expresses appreciation by asking his boss to lead the government. This is an extremely bizarre change of leadership.... President Putin dismissed U.S. and European criticism by saying that Russia is not aiming for state capitalism and that state-run companies are intended to be temporary. However, he did not clarify how long this 'temporary' situation will continue.... There is no choice for the rest of the world but to voice serious concern about the emergence of state capitalism in Russia under a leader who has continued the KGB tradition of prioritizing ends over means and trampling on democracy."

**¶2. "Russia Attempts to Restore Military Balance"** A

Moscow-based reporter for the top-circulation, moderate Yomiuri wrote (12/13): "Due to President Putin's unilateral declaration that Russia will no longer observe the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), it has now been effectively nullified. By suspending its participation in the convention rather than withdrawing, Moscow appears to be keeping open the option of returning. However, the decision demonstrates Putin's uncompromising position against the eastward expansion of NATO."

SCHIEFFER